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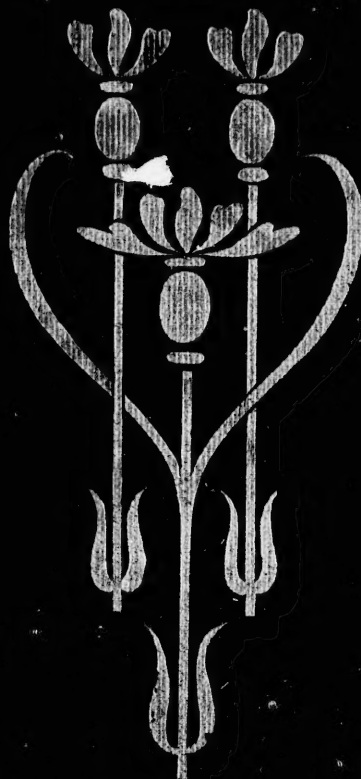
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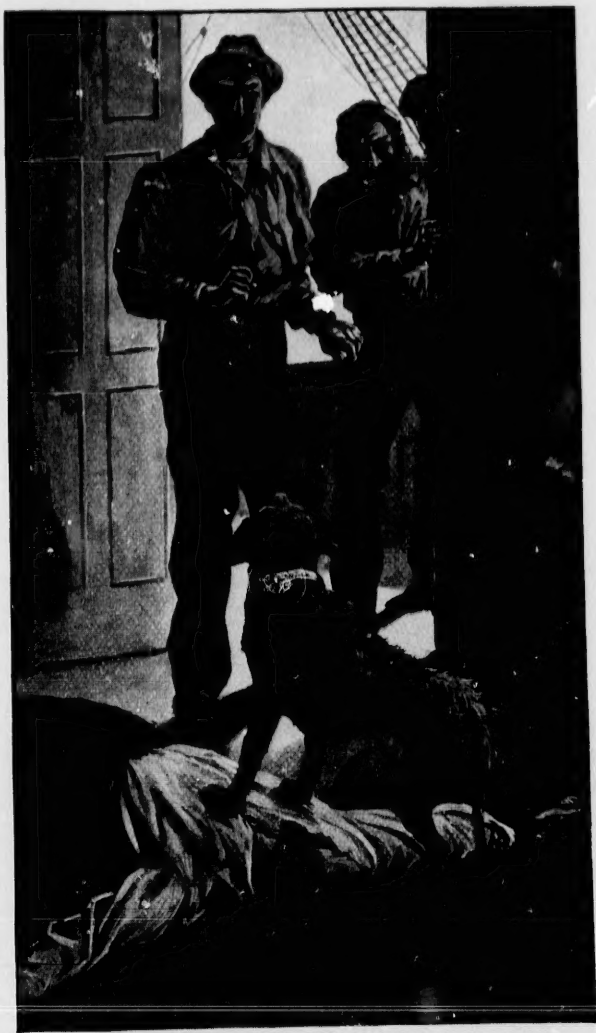
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BY
W. CLARK RUSSELL

AUTHOR OF

The Dogford Mystery
An O'case Free Lance
A Saker's Smoothheart

TORONTO
THE TORONTO NEWS COMPANY
42 YONGE STREET



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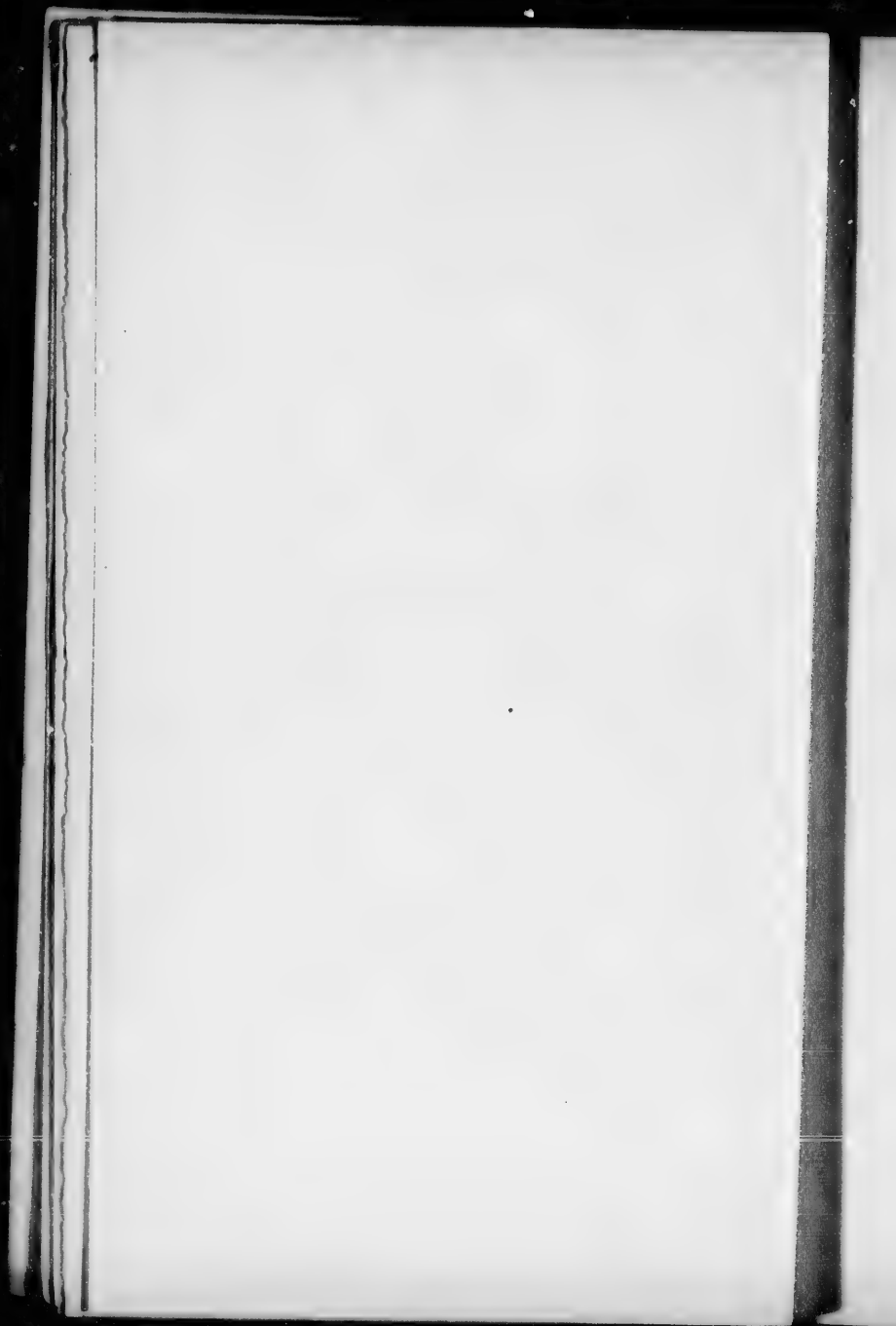
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CHAPTER I.



IN 1848 I was third mate of a ship called the *Mohican*, a full-rigged craft of 1,200 tons, bound from the River Thames to Adelaide with a general cargo and five first-class passengers only. My name is George Derbyshire, and at the time of this story I was twenty-one years of age, with a second mate's certificate in my chest, but the berth itself still to come. I was very tall, very broad-shouldered, so massively made, in short, that I could have passed for forty; and I believe I might have been counted as among the most active of sea-

men—certainly the liveliest of the ship's company who swung their hammocks in the forecastle of the *Mohican*—always the first aloft, and the quickest in "laying down" as it is called; the first at the ear-ling, the first at the brace, the first to show the way if there was ever any hanging in the wind. All this I may say after these long years without grave risk of being thought egotistical.

Now, being a good sailor, I looked for good treatment: but this no man among us got. The master of the ship was a person named Scudder; as coarse, surly, ill-conditioned a rogue as ever stepped the planks of a ship's deck. He could

scarcely speak with decent civility even to the passengers, though he was careful never to offend them. The crew he regarded as so many dogs, fit only to be sworn at and whistled to and kicked, and could he have had his way and revived some of the agreeable traditions of old naval discipline, there is little doubt that he would have diverted himself every day with a picturesque spread-eagling scene at the gangway—in other words, with a bare back and as many lashes as he could compel his muscular arm to deliver.

I have him before me very clearly in my mind's eye—a long body, resting with a sort of iron rigidity upon

a pair of legs that went in a bow to his immense feet like the outline of a cask. He was a man of about fifty, with a quantity of coarse red hair dashed with white, a brick-red complexion, and pale eyes which seemed to glimmer and snap at one as they stared through their almost white lashes. His nose appeared to have been broken, and the end of it projected in the form of a woman's thimble—a veritable peg of a nose, upon which indeed a sailor might have been able to hang his sou'-wester. An uglier, a more malevolent villain never sailed the ocean. How I treated him, and how he treated me, and what came of it, it is now

my business to relate after holding my tongue on the subject for hard upon two - and - forty years.

Our passage to that point of latitude and longitude which was the scene of what I am about to tell had been extraordinarily long, owing to heavy gales of wind which had held us hove-to in the Bay of Biscay, then to baffling light breezes on the bow, and to many days of calm. It took us, in short, something more than six weeks to reach the Canary parallels; and even when there the Equator seemed a twelvemonth distant, so light was the crippling head wind, without a smear of trade cloud anywhere

about, and the mercury in the barometer as steady as though the metal were counterfeited by silver-paper.

I was in the chief mate's watch. This mate was a man named Hollins, a plain, quiet, sensible man, who, speaking once to me about the captain, said that he had made up his mind not to be betrayed into jeopardizing his professional chances by the skipper's brutal manners, and coarseness, and insult of accost, and that he would outweather him if he were the devil himself. I say I was in this man's watch, and at noon on April 12th, 1848, I came on deck to keep his lookout for a brief spell while

he went below to work out the "sights."

It was very hot; the sun from his meridian looked down out of a cloudless, wide-reaching sweep of azure upon a sea that was of a darker blue than the heavens, flashing in glory under that central eye of luminary, and flowing in long, light lines of swell, upon which the ship swayed, scarcely wrinkling the water at her bows, so faint was the impulse of the delicate hot wind in her canvas that lay stretched almost fore and aft, rising in lustrous heights to the main skysail, which showed wan in the liquid blue air like the moon in daytime.

Mr. Hollins arrived on deck shortly after one bell. He was followed by the captain and the passengers, all of whom were men. I have often since taxed my memory to no purpose to get at the nature of the errand on which I was sent aloft; but this I remember, that the captain suddenly whipped out an order in his harsh, offensive voice, in obedience to which I sprang into the main rigging. I believe the command had reference to some chafing-gear up in the neighborhood of the topmast cross-trees, upon which an ordinary seaman had been employed during the forenoon watch.

I descended, after having been

aloft about five minutes, and arrived in the maintop, which it is proper here to describe as a sort of platform for spreading the topmast rigging, fixed a little below the head of the lower-mast. I paused a moment, with my hand on a shroud, to look down before putting my legs over into the futtock rigging. There was a short awning abaft—a few fathoms of it only; saving this, the fine flush decks of the ship showed fair to my sight from end to end in a gleaming sweep of sand-like whiteness iridescent with the dried brine of the morning's "wash-down." Mr. Hollins was aft, standing to leeward of the wheel, looking into

the binnacle. The captain had come forward to almost abreast of the main rigging, and was watching some men who were stitching upon a sail stretched along in the waist. His figure was almost directly under me as I looked down, and the round of the tall hat he invariably wore in all weathers showed like the lid of a saucepan in its clean circumference directly below.

As I was in the act of kneeling with a sweep of my foot, so as to pass it over on to the ratlines of the futtock-shrouds, I kicked some movable object sheer over the rim of the top. I had noticed nothing. I imagined that what my foot

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struck had been a small loose block—a jewel-block, perhaps, left lying in the top through the carelessness or forgetfulness of one of the hands. As I dropped into the shrouds I perceived the figure of the captain below in a posture of recoil: as though he had sprung back and then stood transfixed and thunderstruck, with his eyes rooted upon some object on the deck and his arms extended. I dropped from one ratline to another leisurely: there was no hurry, nothing to be done on deck. As I descended, the captain looked up at me. His face was dark with blood and temper; his pale eyes seemed on fire. I observed that his huge

mutton hands were clenched as his arms slowly fell to his side; his throat was swelled, his breathing labored, and for a breath or two I came to a pause in the rigging, astonished by his appearance and expecting to see him fall in a fit.

I sprang from the rail on to the deck, which brought me close to where he was standing. In the swift glance I had thrown fore and aft I noticed that the sailors who had been at work on various jobs were holding their hands while they gazed in the direction of the captain; the chief mate had also come a little way forward and stood as though exchanging whispers with

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a couple of the passengers, the three of them meanwhile keeping their eyes fixed upon the captain.

"That's your doing, is it?" exclaimed the skipper, glaring upon me as though he would devour me, and speaking in a voice hoarse and indistinct with rage, and pointing at the deck within a few feet of him, where I saw a marlinespike erect, its sharp point buried in the white plank.

This was the object I had accidentally kicked out of the top!

"I am very sorry, sir," I began—

"Sorry!" he interrupted, heaping in the same breath a dozen brutal, filthy, mortally insulting

words upon me. "Sorry! You meant that thing for my head!"

"No, sir," I cried, fetching a deep breath and feeling my own hands shaping themselves into fists as his were, through the wrath aroused in me by his horrid, shocking abuse in the full hearing of the passengers and the sailors.

What followed I must not attempt to describe. There are, I believe, but few words of his cruel blasphemous abuse which have escaped my memory, so deeply chiselled upon my mind was this brief passage of my life, from what afterwards befell me through it; but I must not write what I recollect. Spluttering out his brutal

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fury of words, he approached me close, and then I let fall my arms which I had tightly folded, not doubting that he was about to strike me. One expression he literally hissed into my face—a term that made a very devil of me; scarcely was it pronounced when my fist flashed fair between his eyes, and down he went, straight and stiff as a statue, with a blow of the back of his head upon the hard plank that I believed had done as effectually for him as though indeed his brain had been pierced by the marlinespike.

It was a blow fit to fell an ox with. In my coolest hour I might almost have rated myself as strong

as any two men aboard that ship; but now the nerve of fury had been put into my muscle, and the cursing, blaspheming, tyrannous villain stretched his length as though felled by a blast of lightning.

The mate and passengers came rushing along, there was a hurry of seamen from forwards, and in a moment the prostrate man and myself were in the heart of a little crowd.

"Mr. Hollins," I cried, "you heard his language, sir. He is an infamous liar. I struck the marlinespike out of the top by accident. I did not see it—did not know it was there. I call upon

you to witness that what I have done was done in self-defence and out of such temper as the mildest being must have felt, so provoking, insulting, monstrous in his language was that scoundrel."

The mate, kneeling by the fallen man, called for water, the sailors shuffled among themselves, but no man quitted his business of staring. Blood was flowing from the captain's nose, and it appeared to be draining from his lips; and in his insensibility and thus disfigured he was an ugly sight and seemed a corpse.

But on a sudden he breathed deep, rolled his eyes, and then touching his mouth with his hand

looked at his fingers. The sight of the blood you would have thought electrified him. He sprang to his feet, and stood swaying with an odd nervous twitching of his fingers as though mechanically grabbing for support. With his head bent forward and breathing swiftly, he stared around him until his eyes lighted on me; then you saw the full perception of what had happened enter his face; he poised his figure as though he would rush upon me. The mate said something and put out his hand, on which the captain exclaimed, in a low voice:

"Clap that ruffian in irons, and let him be locked up below until

the forepeak is got ready for him."

So saying, he covered his face with a huge red handkerchief and went with a reeling gait to the companion hatch, down which he disappeared.

"Send the carpenter aft with the irons, one of you," said the mate, addressing the sailors, who still hung around staring, whispering, here and there one of them grinning, all of them wearing countenances that defined no lack of secret satisfaction. "The rest of you turn in. Pull that marline-spike out."

A man laid hold of it, but so deep had the sharp-ended bar

pierced the deck that it yielded only to a hearty drag from the fellow's two hands.

"Mr. Derbyshire," continued the mate, in his easy voice and with his quiet air, "I am sorry for this."

"I am professionally ruined," I answered: "but you will find I will have done the ship's company a service. The fellow will remember my fist, and for the future talk to his men as men."

"The captain has a foul mouth, Mr. Hollins," said one of the passengers, who stood by with a pale face.

"Had I known his character I should certainly not have taken passage in this ship," exclaimed a

second passenger, who was as pale as the other, but who, nevertheless glanced aft with defiance, as though he would have had the captain hear him. "If it came to the question of a lawsuit between you and him, Mr. Derbyshire, you may count upon testimony enough from me to cast him."

"I shall certainly take care to mark my opinion of him by my behavior," said the first passenger.

The carpenter arrived, dangling the leg-irons as he walked. The mate, with a kindly gesture, put his hand upon my arm, and he and I and the carpenter went to the companion-hatch, for the main-hatch was closed, the 'tween-deck

cargo coming flush with it, and there was no other way of entering the berth in which I was to be imprisoned than the companion-ladder. Some of the men forward raised a small cheer as the three of us moved aft; the mate looked behind him and lifted his hand, but said nothing.

The *Mohican* was somewhat curiously constructed in her internal fittings. The forward part of the cabin in which the passengers lived and ate, consisted of a very massive, handsome bulkhead, somewhat richly decorated, and embellished with a wide sheet of mirror. The sleeping accommodation was aft. On the starboard side of the

bulkhead was a small door which provided access to a space of the 'tween-decks betwixt the cabin bulkhead and a very much lighter bulkhead that walled off this interior from a few feet abaft the main-hatch. There were four berths in this place, and they were severally occupied by the first and second mates and myself. The second mate, a man named Pater-son, and I shared one of the berths on the port side. Two of them were, therefore, unoccupied, and the sailmaker made use of them as lockers for the storage of a mass of the stuff over which he had control.

The three of us passed through

the bulkhead door and came to a pause. The place was in darkness, and the mate opened the door of his berth to obtain light from the scuttle or porthole in it.

"Into what cabin am I to put you, Derbyshire?" said he. "I am afraid it will have to be one of the sailmaker's rooms. The captain will mean you to be alone, or I am greatly mistaken."

"It will not matter," I answered bitterly. "He has treated me, as he has treated all the rest of us, like a dog from the very first of the voyage. And now the ruffian talks of making a rat of me by flinging me into the forepeak."

"The men 'll not let him do that, sir," said the carpenter.

"Hold your jaw!" said the mate.
"I'm here, and you've got to talk as though you knew it."

But there was no temper in his words. It was a mere mechanical protest, devoid of significance.

"Which will give you most space?" he continued, and after looking into the cabins he chose the port one.

The carpenter then knelt and attached the irons to my legs. My face burned, and my heart so swelled that I could not have uttered a syllable for constriction of the throat. There was an old

black chest close against me, and I seated myself upon it.

"Bring Mr. Derbyshire's mattress out of his cabin," said the mate. "You will have to lie upon the deck," said he. "I am heartily sorry for this. It is too late now; but you should have learned to bite your lip as I do."

I could not speak to him. The carpenter dragged my mattress in.

The mate said: "I will leave you to lock the door. Bring me the key on deck."

He delivered this in a tone of voice that must have conveyed his wishes to a duller intelligence than the carpenter's, and when he was gone the man acted upon the sug-

gestion the mate had implied by asking me what I wished him to bring from my cabin.

"Nothing, nothing," I exclaimed, heartsick, and speaking with difficulty.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Derbyshire," said he soothingly, "there'll be comfortable matters to fetch, I warrant ye. But let me bear a hand, or the old man'll be turning up," meaning by the "old man" the captain.

The second mate lay in the cabin I had occupied; I heard him asking questions of the carpenter, and the other talked to him in a voice of inquiry. The carpenter then returned, bringing with him my pipe and tobacco, an armful of

books out of my shelf, a bull's-eye lamp and matches, a bottle half full of rum (the property of the second mate, and sent to me with a friendly message of encouragement), my blankets and other matters of a like kind. The worthy fellow then stood to take a look round, and was about to quit the berth when he halted and approached me, and taking my hand in both his, squeezed it hard while he said: "Cheer up, sir. It'll all come right. The sailors are wi' ye to a man, and ye've got good friends in Mr. Hollins and Mr. Paterson."

So saying he closed the door, locked it, and withdrew the key.

All this had happened so suddenly that for some time I was unable to realize the truth and grasp to its depth the wretchedness of my situation. Scarcely more than twenty minutes had passed from the moment of my striking the marlinespike out of the top down to this time of being imprisoned, sitting with my legs loaded with iron, in an atmosphere that was hardly more than a weak glimmering of daylight. I cast my eyes around me. The berth was plentifully loaded with rolls of sailcloth, masses of twine, coils of small gear, new canvas buckets, and a variety of stuff of that sort. The little space that remained was filled

by my mattress and the chest on which I sat, and which, as I might suppose, was filled with the machinery for sailmaking—palms and prickers and needles and the like. The glass of the scuttle or porthole was grimy, for here was a berth that was no more than a locker, and that demanded no care in the shape of polishing or cleaning.

The bunk that had stood under the scuttle had been removed, and the little window was therefore accessible to me providing I was able to drag my ironed legs to it; for which I was thankful, since we were already in the hot latitudes, and every day would intensify the

ardency of the sun; and I easily guessed what the temperature of this little dark interior must rise to if the porthole was kept closed when the white blaze of the sun should be all day long upon the sand-colored steaming planks over my head, putting such fire into them that the steel-hard pitch betwixt the seams would grow fluid as butter on a dog-day.

But I would not immediately open the porthole lest the captain should arrive and think me too comfortable and cool, and order me to be flung into God knows what part of the ship, if it were not the forepeak. He had spoken of that forepeak as you know; threatened

me with it as a man would who means what he says; and I do not mind owning that every instinct in me recoiled from the horrors of such a jail. The forepeak of a ship is a sort of black well right in the bow, under the forecastle, where it is customary to keep the odds and ends of a vessel's wants—paint-pots, and slush-pots, and tarpots, and coal, and much more that I need not weary you by cataloguing. A ship's forepeak, too, is a playground for the rats. Down in it they may be heard squeaking their loudest. They crawl up out of it into the mariner's bedroom—the forecastle—and devour what they can find, and

gnaw the toe-nails of the sleeping Jacks.

If the captain had made up his mind to imprison me in the fore-peak there could be no help for it; he was Lord Paramount—the despot of the little floating kingdom he commanded—and his will was law; and in those days marine Acts of Parliament were few, if any, so that a captain's power was out and away greater than it now is, and he could fearlessly give play to every ruffianly quality of his soul.

If this Captain Scudder ordered me to be conveyed into the fore-peak, he would find men to execute his commands. The sympathies

of the crew might be wholly on my side, but they were not likely to mutiny and forfeit their wages, and heavily suffer for their behavior, should the captain be able to carry them to a port, merely because they were sorry for me.

I sat with this fear of being locked up in the black forepeak maddeningly active in my brain. For what would such an imprisonment signify? Our rate of progress had been horribly slow so far; the Equator was still leagues and leagues distant; there might be another four months, a long four months, before us ere the Australian shore should heave into sight; during all which time I

might be left to lie in that dark, noisome, rat-ridden cavern under the forecastle, fed on bread and water, lowered or flung down to me, almost forgotten by the crew, to be charged at the expiration of the passage with assault and mutiny, the punishment for which might consist of many more weeks of imprisonment ashore. Added to these thoughts was the reflection that I was professionally ruined. That is to say, I might go on following the sea before the mast, but that my career as a mate, with the prospect of one day commanding a ship, was at an end. My mother was a widow, and I was her only son, and we were very poor. She

had denied herself to help me with clothes and a trifle of money during my penniless term of apprenticeship, and I had looked forward to being able to maintain her when I should have obtained a berth as second mate on four or five pounds a month—a berth I had little doubt of getting next voyage.

And yet though I had acted as a fool, my temper would not suffer me to reproach myself for my folly. I looked at the irons upon my legs, I recalled the figure of the brutal creature as he lay stretched and bleeding upon the deck, the insult that had swept my fist into his face still lay burning in my heart, and again and again I brought my

clenched hand savagely down upon the chest on which I was seated, crying aloud in my passion that for less than he had said to me I would fell the ruffian twenty times over, though it should come at last to my killing him and being hanged for him!

When it was about one o'clock I found the heat of the cabin so great that I made shift to get on my legs, and by placing my elbows on objects on either hand of me, I contrived to reach the scuttle, which I unscrewed and opened. The brightness off the sea streamed through, and was pleasant refreshment to my eyes after the dirty shadow flung upon the daylight in

this little interior by the begrimed glass of the porthole. But the window was on the lee side, and no air seemed to enter, though the atmosphere sweetened a bit after I had opened the scuttle. The ship was moving very slowly through the water. I could hear the twinkling of little foam-bells close under the porthole, and the sob of the eddies as they went sluggishly washing past. There was a dim note of human voices, too, with the occasional creak of a block, and the straining sound of gear chafing to the light heave of the ship upon the running folds of the azure swell.

Presently I heard two bells

sounding—signifying one o'clock. The key of the cabin door was inserted, the lock shot back, and the steward entered with a lime-juice jar in one hand and a parcel in the other. He placed these things upon the deck, and then, holding the door closed by one hand as though to prevent his voice from being heard, he exclaimed, with an air of mystery, yet of hurry too, speaking very softly:

“My orders was to furnish you with a small supply of ship's bread and water. That there jar's full o' cold water. In that there parcel you'll find biscuit and a few other matters which I ventured to wrap up. You'll please keep 'em out of

sight, case th' old man should show hisself. You've done werry well, sir. All hands is proud of you, Mr. Derbyshire. Don't take on about it, sir; the crew'll stand up for ye when the time comes for you to want 'em."

I answered in the same soft voice he had used:

"I am very much obliged to you, steward. Do nothing that is likely to bring you into difficulties. What are the captain's intentions concerning me, do you know?"

He hung in the wind a moment and then said awkwardly:

"Well, sir, to be plain, he talks of locking you up in the forepeak. He's been all bluster during lunch,

swearing all sorts o' revenges; that in all his time he never was so sarved. He calls you a wild beast; and that you must lie in the forepeak till you're tamed, and that, he reckons, won't happen till he's able to hand ye over to the police ashore. That's been the nature of his talk, sin' you ask me. But I allow that if he's got courage enough to lock you up in that stinking hole under the forecastle the crew'll ha' courage enough to smartly whip you out of it again and keep you out of it. But I can't stop now," with which he slipped through the door and locked it.

I was thirsty and drank freely

from the lime-juice jar. I then opened the parcel of food and found, in addition to a quantity of ship's bread, the half of a ham, a lump of such salt beef as they put upon the cabin table, and two or three tins of preserved meats opened ready for use. There was also a knife and fork and a small tin pannikin.

Having eaten, I concealed the victuals in the chest, which I used as a seat, then lighted a pipe and gave myself up to reflection. All the time I was troubled with the thought that the cabin door might be flung open, giving me a view of the captain and a couple of seamen whom, with purple face and infuri-

ate gesture, he would order to convey me to the forepeak. I had no hope of the crew rescuing me from that dungeon. The steward might suggest this, but I knew Jack's character, and that with him to be out of sight is too often to be out of mind.

The day passed slowly. I took a book from the little heap that had been brought me, but could not fix my attention. The incident of the day coupled with the sense of wretchedness born of it had somewhat unmanned me, perhaps weakened my mind a little; and at times fits of nervousness would seize me. Suppose any disaster to befall the ship, locked up

and heavily ironed I should be left to miserably perish like a rat in a hole: I figured the vessel foundering—the water gushing into this little berth slowly enough to render the contemplation of death a long agony. Then I imagined the days to pass and myself forgotten, the broiling deck for a roof, and no water to drink and my cries unheard; for it needed but a little breeze to raise noises enough on deck to render my shouts through the porthole inaudible, while there was assuredly no virtue in my lungs to penetrate the stout bulkheads and deck which formed the walls and ceiling of my prison.

The weather continued very quiet. When the evening came I stood with my face at the circular porthole, viewing the dark liquid heaven in the east, upon which floated a few delicate clouds, with their western shoulders exquisitely bronzed by the crimson in the west. My dejection was beyond expression, and I could think of nothing but my poor mother, my ruined prospects, what I should do, what spirit I should have to bear the fearfully long imprisonment that was threatened, whether in this narrow berth or in the blackness of the forepeak.

The darkness came swiftly, and the porthole framed a little dance

of soft and glorious stars. They slid up and down with the gentle heave of the ship, and the reflection of one of them lay in a little rill of gold under it, widening and contracting upon the swell.

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CHAPTER II.

I was lying broad awake upon my mattress, unable to sleep, as much through the heat and my miserable thoughts as through that horrible sensation of weight and imprisonment at my ankles, when I heard seven bells — half past eleven. The hush upon the ship was profound. The silence was accentuated rather than disturbed by an occasional dull, muffled creak, and by the light yearning noise of water dreamily floating off the side of the ship as she stooped.

On a sudden my attention was

caught by a sound of scraping outside, and a moment or two later my name was pronounced in a whisper. I instantly sat up and turned to the porthole, and found it eclipsed by the interposition of a dark object.

"Can ye hear me, Mr. Derbyshire?" was said in a hoarse whisper.

"Ay; who are you?" I answered.

"Hush!" he exclaimed; "I'm Jim Dixon."

This was the man in the chief mate's watch—a very likely, lively, and willing sailor, as I had always found him.

"What are you holding on by?"

said I. "Mind you don't go overboard."

"I'm right enough," he answered; "snug in a bowline with Bill Watson at the belaying-pin keeping a lookout." By which he signified the pin to which the bowline in which he swung was secured.

"What do you want?" said I.

"I'm here to say that Bill and me is willing to leave the ship in one of the quarter-boats if so be as you'll come along too," he said.

I was startled by the proposal, and was silent some moments with surprise. Then said I:

"Leave the ship! Ah, willingly indeed, Dixon. I'd leave her this

instant, and if it were a whole ten-mile swim to the nearest port I'd venture it to escape what's before me. But how am I to join you, ironed and locked up as I am? And how are you going to get away with the boat? Do you reckon upon the mate of the watch and the man at the wheel turning in and giving you a chance of escape?"

"See here, sir," he exclaimed, whispering hoarsely, and talking with rapid but distinguishable utterance, "the job's in hand, and can be managed providing you'll consent to come along with us. Mr. Paterson's your friend. He'll see nothen. He's willing to be

gagged and secured by turn upon turn of rope. Whoever may be at the wheel will see nothen either. There's no man aboard this vessel as has got eyes for the capt'n's use. That you know, sir."

"Wait a moment," said I, feeling my heart beating fast.

I struggled on to my feet, and as quietly as possible dragged myself close to the porthole that I might converse without being obliged to raise my voice.

"I am close to you now," said I, speaking with my mouth in the orifice, the glass of which, it is needless to say, had stood open since I first unscrewed it.

"Right!" he answered.

"I am perfectly willing to join you," said I; "but how am I to be released?"

"The carpenter has charge of the key," he answered, referring to the padlock on the irons, which were of an antiquated fashion; "he's willing to let it be stole. The steward's got the key of that there berth. He's likewise willing that it should be stole."

"This conspiracy has been swiftly arranged!" cried I.

"Hush, sir! If the capt'n should come on deck——" he paused as though listening, then softly called to the fellow above, but the reply was inaudible to me. "The long and short of it's this,"

he continued; "there's nothen afore ye, Mr. Derbyshire, but a spell of the forepeak, that's like to last till we gets to Australia. Mr. Paterson is heartily consarned for ye; so is Mr. Hollins I allow; but he's to know nothen. The thing'll happen in his watch below. Us two men are sick of the voyage, and by us two men I mean Bill Watson and me, and as the Canaries ain't fur off we're agreeable to start fur 'em providing you make one of us. Otherwise, whose to navigate the boat?"

"Do you mean to leave to-night?"

"Ay!" he answered; "by one bell in the morning watch we

ought to be well clear of this bloomin' hooker."

"But I cannot help you. I am lying here, as you know, fettered—locked up."

"No call for you to help us," he answered; "we'll get everything ready, and then sneak down and release you."

"You will have to water and provision the boat, and put a compass and sextant and such matters into her. And how is all this to be done?"

"Is it settled?" he interrupted.

"Yes," I exclaimed, "it is settled. But if the captain should come on deck?"

"We shall be three to one," he

cried, in a voice as though he spoke with his teeth set. "Three to one," he added, "with no fear of anybody interfering."

"Right," I said, and a moment later the porthole lay clear to the sliding stars.

I dropped on all fours, wriggled on to the mattress, and lay waiting and thinking. How unnerved I was I might know by the hurry and agitation of my thoughts. The undertaking was a frightfully bold and audacious one. First of all, it would involve an act of felony, by which I mean that we should steal the boat. Next we should be committing ourselves to a tiny ark in the heart of a great

ocean, for the nearest land—the Canaries—was certainly not less than a hundred and fifty to two hundred miles distant. Then, if we were picked up or arrived at a port, we should have to invent a story—tell a lie, and a long one—with a heavy chance on top of being suspected and detained, or handed over for further inquiries.

But against these and other considerations I had to weigh the misery and suffering that lay before me. Moreover, the mere act of leaving the ship, even as a thief, could not greatly deepen the dark hue of my professional outlook. Indeed my thoughts landed me finally in a single apprehension:

that the captain might come on deck when we were in the very act of lowering the boat, in which case some wild deed of violence was sure to follow, and this I abhorred the idea of.

I was greatly moved when I reflected upon the sailorly sympathy of Paterson and the others, who were to assist me in a negative way to escape the horrors of an imprisonment that must last for months, and that was certain to be promoted by a long term of captivity ashore. Had Dixon sound-
ed the second mate, or was the scheme Paterson's? To think of the worthy fellow consenting to be gagged and bound! I believed that

I lay dreaming, but a single movement of my legs sufficed to tell me that I was bitterly wide awake indeed.

The length of twenty nights seemed to have been compressed into this time of waiting. I heard no sounds; I strained my ears, but all was dumb as the tomb, saving the summer note of flowing waters floating through the open scuttle, and now and again a light straining of the cargo in the hold. I lay in the deepest blackness, being unwilling to light the bull's-eye, for I was constantly fancying that the captain would at any moment open the door and look in, and this might happen now, though I was

on the hope of escaping his brutal tyranny; and if he looked in and saw me with a light and lying on a mattress, and as comfortable, saving to be sure the irons on my legs, as if I were in my own berth, and at liberty, he would give such orders as might utterly frustrate our project.

I heard eight bells strike—four o'clock—and the second mate came out of the opposite cabin and went on deck. He rapped twice on my door as he passed, the meaning of which was as intelligible to me as a look or a whisper. There was another interval of dead hush; the light night wind seemed to have perished, as I might fancy from

the muffled sound of canvas softly swaying in and out from the masts. One bell was struck—half-past four—and the solitary chime was yet trembling when I heard a sound outside, the key was inserted, and the door quickly opened.

"Hain't ye got a light?" said Dixon's voice.

"Yes," said I. "Are you alone?"

"Ay. For God's sake bear a hand and show a glim, sir. All's ready up above."

I passed my hand about, felt for and found the lamp, and lighted it. Dixon immediately kneeled, put a key into the padlock of the irons,

and released me. It was not a moment for asking questions. He laid the irons softly down upon the mattress, then threw the bull's-eye lamp into the sea through the port-hole, and told me to follow him. I whispered:

"Is the captain stirring?"

"He was on deck at eight bells. He's been below since. Come along, sir."

There was no light in the saloon cabin, as I may call it. We sneaked like shadows to the companion-steps and gained the deck, and the moment we emerged Dixon shut-to the companion-doors and secured them, so that the captain was as effectually imprisoned

below as ever I had been. This was a plain remedy that should have occurred to me when I sat thinking on what might follow if the captain showed himself; yet, strangely enough, it had not entered my head. But, indeed, as I have before said, my mind had been somewhat weakened by the trouble and grief of that day. The man Watson stood at one of the falls of the forward quarter-boat on the starboard side. The *Mohican* carried four quarter-boats in davits, a captain's gig over the taffrail, and a long-boat under the booms in the waist. The helmsman stood motionless as an iron figure at the wheel. All the wind

was gone, as I had supposed. The water stretched in an oil-like blackness of surface spotted with star-flakes, and the sky was filled with sparkling and twinkling lights which flung a faint sheen upon the moonless morning, amid which the three spires of the ship hovered in ghostly pallor.

"Where is Mr. Paterson?" I exclaimed.

Dixon pointed forward to the port rail, where the shadow of the main-shrouds hung in a deep dye of obscurity. I instantly distinguished the figure of the second mate and hastily went to him. His mouth was buried in some sort of gag, a line was wound round

and round his figure, imprisoning his arms and legs, and I could make out that he was secured to the rail by further ligatures.

"God bless you for your goodness, my dear friend," I whispered; "this is my one and only chance, I believe, and I shall never forget you."

Dixon called; I pressed Pater-son's hand as it lay strapped upon his thigh, and with a swelling heart glided over to the boat.

"Is everything in readiness?" I exclaimed — "Water, provisions, my sextant, a compass."

I swiftly ran through the catalogue, and an affirmative answer was murmured as I pronounced

each item. As noiselessly as possible we eased away the falls and let the boat sink to the water. The ship was without an inch of way upon her, and the boat rested alongside as though on the water of a lake. I softly cried a farewell to the fellow who was at the wheel, and the three of us went down hand over hand, unhooked the falls, and Dixon breathlessly thrust the boat off with an oar, giving her impulse enough to float her to some little distance astern.

It wanted now about a quarter to five. We could therefore reckon upon another long hour of darkness. Without as much as a whisper we lightly laid our oars

betwixt the thole-pins, and fell to gently dipping them, lest dripping of the water from the blades and the splash of their immersion should pass to the captain's ears through his port, which was large and which we might conceive would be wide open on such a sultry silent night as this.

When we believed ourselves out of earshot we went to work with a will, and the boat hummed through the still surface. What strength my fears and resolution put into my own oar I might know by having the other two oars against me, and by my often having to slacken that I might keep the boat's head straight. The

wake stretched behind us in a thin line of green fire, and to every rise of the oars the water poured off the blades in glowing sheets. We took no heed of how we headed, for our business was to put the ship at the widest distance our arms could measure ere sunrise should flash out the whole scene of ocean.

We continued to row with might and main for half an hour. The loom of the tall ship, pale in the starlight, swiftly melted into the general obscurity, and in that half-hour we had probably put between three and four miles between her and us. A light catspaw of air then tarnished the water, and it

freshened into a pleasant breeze while we continued to ply our oars. This being so, we threw our oars in, stepped the mast, and hoisted the big lug-sail that belonged to the boat, and then, setting a course for the Canaries by the little compass upon which we flashed the light of a bull's-eye lamp, we hauled the sheet aft, and drove through the gloom, looking up to our course by within a point and a half.

We had now leisure to breathe and talk. Daybreak was not yet at hand, and the breeze that was now blowing must so widen the interval between the ship and us that there was very little chance of our

being within sight of her when daylight came, though the topmast of her cloths, glancing in silver in the far blue gleam of the horizon, might be visible to us.

"Supposing the captain, on finding his boat stolen, should reckon on our heading for the Canaries, and up hellum in pursuit of us; how then?" said Dixon.

"How is he going to catch us? A ship don't answer her hellum like a boat, mate. No fear of the old man following," exclaimed Watson.

"How long a time was to elapse," said I, "before the second mate should be released?"

"That wasn't consarted, sir,"

answered Dixon; "it was old Tom Jorkins as had the wheel. If the capt'n fell a-knocking upon the closed companion Tom wasn't to let him out; his business being to steer the wessel, and not to leave the wheel on any account whatever. If so be as the sounds of the knocking should reach forrards, well and good. Some of the men might lay aft to inquire into the meaning of 't—all very leisurely, as you may take your haffidavit, sir."

"Mr. Paterson 'll not hurt," said Watson, "if he was to be kep' all fast for twenty-four hours. We took care to bind him to his liking."

"And you two men have run away because you are discontented," said I.

"Discontented!" growled Watson; "is there a cusseder wessel afloat? It 'ud a come to my knifing the captain had I stayed," he added, in a cold, dangerous voice. "I've run to save my neck, and my running saves his life."

"But why you two only of the whole ship's company?" said I.

"There were three others willing to join us," exclaimed Dixon, "but they backed out of it at the last."

"With whom did this scheme originate?" I inquired.

"With me," said Watson; "I

was at the wheel when the second mate came and stood alongside of me. He asked if I knew whether the carpenter or the mate had the key of them bloomin' leg-irons. After answering him, I says, reckless-like, 'Mr. Derbyshire's done the ship's company a good turn. It'll be hard if he's to be locked up in the forepeak for the handsome sarvice he's performed. If he could be got out of the ship, here stands a man willing to help.' One thing led to another, and between him and me this here roose was consarted, though sooner than peach ag'in him—he's a true-born gen'leman, is Mr. Paterson, with the feelings of a man."

"And the heart of a sailor," said I.

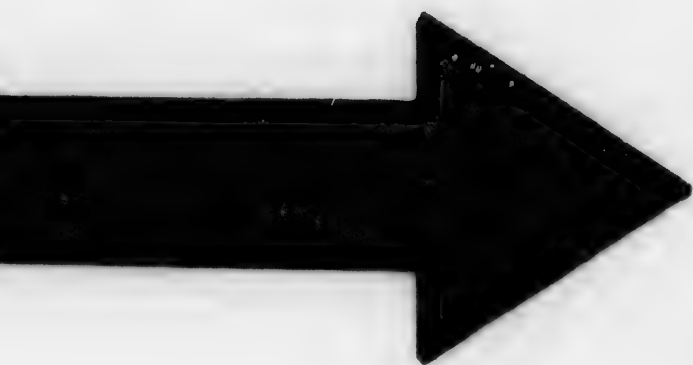
"And Mr. Hollins, too, is of the right sort," broke in Dixon; "he took no notice while we dodged about wittling this here boat and seeing all ready. He helped you in his fashion as much as Mr. Paterson did, sir."

"But this running job will cost you your clothes and your wages, and I'm too poor a man to be able to do more than thank you for my liberty."

"We don't want thanks, sir. It's our liberty we were after, and we've got it," said Watson.

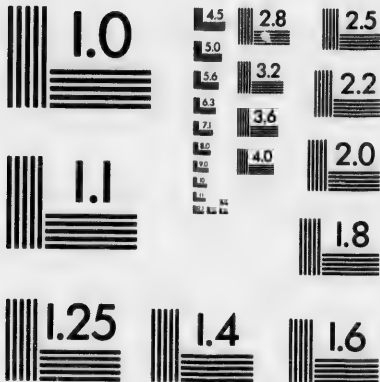
"What's to be the yarn if we fall in with a vessel?" said Dixon.





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"We shall have to tell a lie," said I. "Sorry for it; but what's to be done? I can invent nothing better than to say that we were sent to pick up a man that had fallen overboard, and that we lost the ship in a squall."

"Ain't we too well wittled for that to be believed?" said Watson.

"We must heave everything overboard on sighting a ship," said I.

"But not afore we're sure she means to pick us up," says Dixon.

Thus we chatted while we continued to run pleasantly through that pause of darkness which seemed to deepen as the moment of daybreak approached.

I was too old a seafarer to be astonished by the two men's behavior in leaving the ship. Jack's proverbial quality is recklessness. The pair were already sick of the voyage, hating the captain, in short, to a degree that came perilously near to a sentiment of murder, and they would have quitted the vessel on a spare boom and have taken their chance of being rescued sooner than proceed. An insensibility to what the future might hold and a hearty hatred of his current existence was the characteristic of the sailor of my time. The forfeiture of money owing was not like the sacrifice of money in the pocket. The distant dollar

was an intangible thing; and it seldom influenced Jack's resolutions.

For myself, now that the ship was out of sight, and the great world of dark water stretched around me, my one emotion was that of deep rejoicing over my unexpected deliverance from the misery and degradation of a long voyage of imprisonment in a stifling hold. For I had not the least doubt, had I remained in the vessel, this same day that was about to dawn would have witnessed my confinement in the forepeak. I knew the brutal captain's character. The memory of my blow would operate like a gangrene

in his mind, and short of absolutely murdering me by starvation, there was no inhuman treatment to which the scoundrel soul of the fellow would not have subjected me.

The dawn broke, and the line of the horizon ran in a stirless streak of inky blackness against the cold dull gray. The moment the light grew I sprang on to a thwart with my arm around the mast to take a view of the scene, but there was nothing in sight. The breeze that had blown us one way had blown the ship the other way, and allowing that what with rowing and sailing we had made seven miles since we first shoved off, then the added

distance measured by the *Mohican* had carried the loftiest of her sails out of the range of our vision, and we were alone. The horizon was flawless the whole way round. The dawn is but a brief passage of light in those latitudes; the sun follows rapidly on the heels of day-break, and a few minutes after the granite-like line of the eastern sky had changed into glowing rose, the upper limb of the luminary was sending a noble, sparkling beam across the wide sea, flashing up heaven and ocean into a silver brilliance of blue.

But now with the coming of the sun the wind failed; the pleasant noise of crisping waters ceased;

the boat lost way, and her lug-sail fanned to and fro as the little fabric leaned from side to side on the rise and run of the long-drawn swell. But the *Mohican* was out of sight, and this stagnation, therefore, did not greatly vex us. Our liberty was as complete indeed as if a thousand leagues separated us from the ship.

I got down from the thwart and fell to overhauling with my eyes the instruments and stock of provisions and water with which the two fellows had equipped the boat. I found a liberal store—fresh water enough to last us a fortnight, a good supply of biscuit and tinned meats, and Dixon, lifting the lid

of a locker in the stern-sheets, showed me a chart of this part of the ocean, my sextant, the Nautical Almanack, and other furniture of a like sort, all which had belonged to me, and had been carried from my cabin while I lay locked up, waiting to be released.

We broke our fast, lighted our pipes, and, there being no wind, boomed the sail out with oars to serve as an awning. We could find much to talk about in this adventure, and I took care to thoroughly digest and impress upon the minds of my companions the story we were to relate should we be picked up, so that our recitals might tally; and this would hold

good whether we should be taken aboard a ship, or arrive at a Canary Island port.

I often think, when I look back, that no man but a sailor would have engaged in such an adventure as this. Here were the three of us courting all the perils and horrors of an open boat to escape a form of existence which, even in my case, and allowing that black forepeak to have been a condition of it, need not prove one-tenth as formidable as the risks and sufferings which might attend our method of escaping from the ship. But, fortunately for Jack, a large portion of his character is made up of dare-devilism. To the three of

us the sea was a haunt as familiar to nerve and heart and brain as the fingers of our hands to our eyes. We could look over the low gunwale and stretch our sight into the blue and sunny distance, that showed boundless as we rose to the brow of the swell, with no more emotion than we should have experienced in gazing over the bulwark-rail of a line-of-battle ship. There was no sense of littleness, of miserable helplessness induced by the infinity of waters in which we floated—a mere speck. We yarned cosily, puffed at our pipes, laughed over Mr. Paterson's masquerading device, wondered how it would be when Captain Scudder

made his way through the hatch and found his boat and two of his crew gone, and the imprisoned bird flown. Yet often would I fetch a sigh, for it was a miserable business; the bitterer to my temper in that I had been driven to it by a ruffian. Had my professional ruin been brought about by an act of negligence or stupidity as a seafarer, I might have cursed myself for my blunder, but I could not have felt as I now did when I reflected that I had been betrayed by the most horrible, the most injurious usage, into acting in a manner for which the law of the land and the discipline of the sea could find no justification.

The time passed; now and again the burnished heave of the deep that looked to be rolling in molten brass under the sun would be tarnished by a catspaw; but the weak draught died quickly, and down to about five o'clock that afternoon the boat hung as though made fast to a buoy. But a little while after that hour the northern waters darkened to a breeze, and presently we were reaching with flattened sheet into the northeast, with a little glancing of foam off the keen bows of the boat, and the wrinkles upon the slopes of the swell melting in slender lines of yeast to the brushing of the hot and gushing wind.

We kept a bright lookout for ships, for this was a breeze that might at any minute heave a sail into view; and when the darkness came we settled ourselves into watches, taking care to keep the bull's-eye lamp brightly burning, that we might see how to steer, and also have a signal ready to our hand should the dark shadow of a ship shape itself against the stars suddenly. The wind was dead ahead for the course I wanted to make, and several times that night we put the boat about. We were all three of us anxious to be picked up. The chance of our tale being accepted seemed to us to be like-
lier should we fall in with a vessel

than were we to take it ashore among suspicious foreigners. We had our liberty indeed, but the boat was a prison in its way too, and, sailors as we were, we felt the discomfort of our confinement that night. We could not stretch our limbs in a walk. There was nothing but the hard bottom of the boat to lie upon, and when I was aroused a little before daybreak, from a sleep of three or four hours, every bone in my body ached, and I felt as though I were eighty years old.

The weather was fine and tropical; the warm night wind was sweetened with dew, and the sunrise was of surpassing glory. A

nobler and more gorgeous tapestry of heaven never did I behold in the east. The calm sea caught the early light and flowed in twenty dyes of magnificence. No northern sunset ever had more splendor than this tropic sunrise on the second morning of our escape. Dixon and Watson, two plain, matter-of-fact sailors, with no more of sentiment in them than there is gravy in ship's beef, lay upon the gunwale with their eyes fixed upon the shining many-colored sea and sky, silent with admiration, as though awed; and I marked how their emotions worked in them by their manner of gnawing upon the quid that

stood in a knot out upon their cheek-bones.

"What's that?" cried Dixon, suddenly pointing to the left, or, as I should say, to the north of the wide, fan-shaped stream of fire that was flowing down to the boat on the eastern quarter.

"Sail ho!" exclaimed Watson.

I stood up, and on sheltering my eyes from the flaming waters, on the right I immediately descried a vessel between four and five miles distant from us. I believed at first she was standing to the south, then I thought to the north, and we watched her without speaking until Watson presently called out:

"She looks to me abandoned,
Mr. Derbyshire."

He had the best eyes among the
whole of the crew of the *Mohican*,
and was as good as a telescope to
us here.

"She's under very small canvas,
isn't she, Watson?" said I.

He peered hard, making rings of
his fingers to look through, and
then said:

"Seems to me as if she'd nothen
but a foretops'l and fores'l set. I
can't rightly make out whether
she's got any sticks standing abaft.
She shows a tall side; but she's too
far off to make anything of."

"We'll head for her," said I;
and with that I slackened away the

sheet, and the boat blew languidly along before the faint fiery wind that was gushing like the breath of a blast-furnace out of the south-west.

There was nothing but that ship in sight. Watson said he saw a tip of white down in the west, but I could not see it; and when presently he looked for it again, it had melted out like some feather of steam. In about half an hour we had sufficiently neared the vessel to obtain a clear view of her. We could not yet say that she was derelict, but she had all the appearance of an abandoned craft. Seemingly she had been barque-rigged, but her mizzen-mast was

gone almost flush with the deck; her maintopmast was also gone, and her mainmast showed like a black and riven pillar, naked and forlorn as some lightning-withered pine, saving a shroud or two that held it from going overboard. The full fabric at the fore, however, was intact, even to the topgallant-yard that lay crossed upon the stump topgallantmast. The foretopsail, foresail, and a big standing jib were set. She sat tall upon the water, with the green streak of her copper well above the line of immersion, but the ends of rigging trailing overboard, thick shrouds making into the water, along with the splinters of some

fathom or two of smashed bulwarks abreast of the mainmast, gave her a most abandoned, melancholy look.

We lowered our sail and threw a couple of oars over, pausing upon them to gather whether there were living people aboard her, in which case if we made up our minds to enter her it would be necessary to throw our little freight of provisions and the other furniture of the boat overboard, that the story we meant to tell might be credited.

"I don't see no signs of life," says Watson.

"Nor I," says Dixon.

"Let's close her yet, men," I ex-

claimed. "She'll make a refuge for us, and we may want what we have to support life on. If she's derelict we shall stand a better chance of being taken off her than of being rescued out of this boat, and our being found aboard a wreck will make our yarn a likely one."

The two men fell to their oars, and I kept my eyes fastened upon the ship. Nothing stirred upon her, if it were not a little hurrying of shadows upon her canvas as the cloths hollowed and swelled to her rolling. When we were within hail I bade the men cease rowing, and stood up and shouted. My lungs were a pair of powerful en-

gines in those days, and my voice swept in a roar to the vessel; but there was no response. I hailed her several times, the three of us keenly watching meanwhile for the sight of a human head showing above the rail. I then said:

"She is an abandoned craft. Let's board her," and we drove alongside.

Dixon made fast the end of the boat's painter to a channel-plate, and we scrambled aboard.

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CHAPTER III.

WATSON, who was the first to drop over the rail, uttered a loud cry, and stood pointing with a countenance of horror to a couple of human bodies lying dead at the foot of the seared and blackened mainmast. They were naked to the waist: their shirts seemed to have been ripped off them; the color of the flesh was chocolate; putrefaction had set in. But I need not go on describing the dreadful and ghastly sight.

It was easy to see that the vessel had been struck by lightning that had totally dismasted her abaft.

It was beyond question that the electric fluid had blackened and stripped the two men whose bodies lay at the foot of the mainmast. But from what we presently discovered I could not persuade myself that they were alive when the bolt had fallen.

There was a scuttle-butt or large watercask lashed upon the deck against the bulwarks. I kicked it, and from the note it returned gathered that it was about two-thirds full. A tin dipper was attached to it. I dropped the long thin drinking-vessel through the hole in the cask, and brought it up full of water, which I tasted and found fresh, though as hot from

the sun striking down upon it as if standing to cool after being boiled. However, even supposing there was no more fresh water in the vessel, here, added to our own, was stock enough to provide us with a plentiful allowance every day for several weeks.

Meanwhile, my two companions had been slowly moving forwards, staring about them with the dull motions of the merchant sailor as they advanced, but on their arrival at the little caboose or ship's kitchen, which stood uninjured a few yards abaft the foremast, they both cried to me to come and see. It was another dreadful picture they had called me to witness;

four dead men in a strange, wild heap upon the caboose floor. Two of them were negroes. They were variously apparelled in blue or red shirts, drill or dungaree trousers, and wide straw hats, which lay fallen from their heads upon the deck. Corruption made loathsome objects of them. The countenance of one of the whites was already undistinguishable as a human face.

Watson, backing away, expected violently. Dixon cried, "Them men ain't dead of lightning!"

"No," I exclaimed, recoiling, for what I have described I saw in a single glance; "there has been some pest aboard this ship—some

man-killing fever born of the cargo, or of the African coast from which she may have last hailed. Let us look aft."

There was a long, low deck-house, painted green, with three windows of a side, and this structure ran a little way before the wheel to a little way abaft the main-hatch. The deck of it was sunk below the level of the main deck, and you gained the door by descending two or three steps.

This door we opened and looked in. The blaze of light without rendered the interior somewhat darksome to the eye at first. I advanced a step, but came to a dead halt on hearing a sudden, low,

weak but menacing growl. The two seamen stared over my shoulders. Flat upon its back, with its arms extended, and one foot over another, the head on one side, in the very posture in short of a crucified figure, lay the figure of a man. As I stood looking, horror-stricken by this further apparition of death, a tall, long-legged, phantom-like shape of a dog stood up from the side of a locker beside which it had been lying, and, moving with a dreadful suggestion of weakness, as though at every step it must fall on its side, the gaunt, ragged, unearthly creature, uttering a second weak growl, staggered over to the body, and, put-

ting its forepaws upon the dead man's breast, lay down growling afresh, while it watched us with eyes burning dimly with the fires of famine, like cinders as they die out of their redness after falling upon the hearth.

"Poor beast!" cried Dixon.

"For God's sake get it some water," I exclaimed.

Watson ran out, and in a few moments returned with some water in a tin dish, which he had taken from the galley. He put it down before the dog, which growled on his approach, but when it saw the water the faithful, wretched brute stretched its neck across the dead man's breast to

lap; but it seemed to have no power to drink; its tongue protruded and hung, and even as we watched, the dying creature uttered a low moan, so like to a human wail that one's eyes instinctively sought the face of the corpse, then fell on its side, and after a few rapid pants lay dead.

"A floating graveyard!" exclaimed Dixon, combing the sweat from his brow.

The corpse was that of a finely built man; his hair was long and he wore a beard in the American style, and his face was that of a typical Yankee. One might have thought he had expired only within the hour, so fresh was his com-

plexion. But one could witness the agony of his death yet in the twisted grin of the lips, which exposed the teeth, and in the curl of his fingers, as though the nails were buried in the palms of the hands.

"He'll ha' been the captain, I allow," said Dixon.

"What's to be done, Mr. Derbyshire?" said Watson. "If this 'ere vessel's a pest-house it'll be our turn next."

"We'll sound the well, and see if she's a tight ship anyhow," said I.

We found the rod close against the pumps, dropped it, and it came up showing no more water than

might have been looked for in the staunchest ship whose pumps had not been manned for some days.

"Lift the hatches, and see what the cargo is," said I.

We peered down, and spied a quantity of ballast in the bottom of the hold, but forward, in the shadow, I could see the outlines of a number of white cases. I paused a moment to take a view of the vessel. She was a little barque of about 250 tons, and her being where we had found her, coupled with her dimensions and aspect, and the presence of the seven dead men, put a fancy into my head.

"This is a Yankee craft," said I.

"If I am not greatly mistaken she is a West African trader. Her clean hold makes me believe her to be homeward bound. If so, then she has exchanged her commodities, and somewhere down aft, by exploring, we may meet with a precious cargo—ivory, gum, gold-dust."

The two men stared at me and then at each other.

"If that be so, sir," cried Dixon, fetching his thigh a mighty whack, "there'll be a fortune in salvage for each man of us three, if so be as we can carry her to a port."

The notion that this little barque, or what remained of her,

might be an American trader to Ethiopic waters, rich in West African commodities, drove all fear of there being a plague aboard her out of my head. It was certain at all events that she had no cargo to breed a pestilence, and the bodies I saw were undoubtedly those of men who had perished, not, as I had first supposed, by lightning, but by some fever of the Bonny, or Gabboon, or Lenguela type, which at first, perhaps, had blinded them, and then left them to die a fearful death in darkness and helplessness.

In those days numbers of vessels of various sorts of rig hailing from Boston and other American ports,

but mainly from Salem, did a great trade in bartering on the African coast. Their business lay in obtaining gold-dust and palm-oil from the Gold Coast, ivory from the Gaboon River, gum from Benguela, camwood and peanuts from other places, in exchange for old muskets, cutlasses, flints, brass kettles, wooden clocks, leaf-tobacco, and the like. That this mutilated craft we were aboard of was one of these vessels I was very certain. She was a sort-wood built ship, with the clean bows and yacht-like run of the Yankee clipper; and now I observed written over the doorway of the long deck-house the words, "Mary Carver—Salem"

which went far to confirm me in my hopes of our having lighted upon a noble haul.

Without further speech to my companions I entered the deck-house, followed by them, and made my way aft to where stood four cabins, two of a side. They all showed as though they had been lately occupied. They had probably been shared among the captain, mates, and boatswain or sailmaker. There were blankets in the bunks, and wearing-apparel dangling at the bulkheads, along with a sea-chest in each berth, and other such details of marine furniture. The captain's cabin, however, was easily conjectured, first by the su-

rior quality of the fittings, and next by a table on which were several nautical instruments, comprising a very good chronometer and a new sextant. There were a couple of big chests standing side by side in this cabin; they were heavily clamped with iron, and massively padlocked. There was also a long, brown-painted locker near the door. This I opened, and found it well stocked with clothes and a great quantity of black cake tobacco; but though I hunted throughout this locker and explored some shelves, and sought for the things in other directions, I could nowhere meet with the ship's papers.

"Will they be in them chests?" said Dixon.

Watson laid hold of the huge padlocks and tugged at them. We sought in vain for the keys; then said I:

"The body that lies in the cabin is probably the captain's. Go and feel in his pockets, Watson. The keys may be there. And, Dixon, get you on deck and take a look at the boat, and see that all is right with her, and let me know if there's anything in sight; for if there be a fortune in this hulk it must be ours only, lads, and we must stand by and not let strangers board us."

They hurried grinning, and ex-

claiming to each other in high spirits.

I looked at the two chests, and felt my heart beat strongly. Just now I was a ruined man, professionally extinguished, with no better prospect before me than a bitter, hard life of seafaring before the mast, filled with wretchedness by thoughts of my mother, whom I should be unable to help, pursuing, as I should be compelled, the humblest walk in the worst-paid, most hardly used calling in the world; just now, I say, I was full of these thoughts, and now I stood on the deck of a vessel whose freight might prove to me and my two associates as though we had

fallen on a mine of precious ore. But softly! thought I to myself, checking the mood of exultation that burnt like a blush on my face; those chests may be empty, and the contents in the run and forward scarcely of more value than the ballast which keeps the *Mary Carver* upright.

In a few minutes Watson arrived holding a large key, to which was attached a metal plate merely engraved with the numbers 1-2.

"Overhauling a dead man's a horrible job," he exclaimed, with a loathing shake of his crimson face that discharged a shower of perspiration. "But this'll be the key, I hope."

Dixon entered. "The boat's all safe, sir; and there's nothen in sight. But them bodies nigh the mainmast 'll have to be got over-board. The hatmosphere's full of 'em," and he fell a-sniffing and spitting.

The key fitted both padlocks. The first chest I opened was empty, and the three of us stood looking down into it with stupid faces, and I with a sickened heart. I opened the second.

"Ha!" cried Dixon.

Stowed in rows in this chest were a number of little barrels. I picked one up, and found it heavy as gold. They were small wooden barrels, holding about half a pint

each, and with my knife I cut open the head of the one I held and found it full of gold-dust! I lifted them all one after the other, and every one was of the same weight as the first.

"Is it gold?" exclaimed Dixon in a breathless voice.

"Ay, pure gold," said I, half stupefied by delight and astonishment.

"What'll the lot be worth?" cried Watson, peering into the chest, with his damp, oyster-like eyes protruding from their sockets.

"I've heard say," said I, "that gold-dust fetches about four pounds an ounce."

"Lord!" thundered Dixon.
"Why, there'll be pounds of 't in
that there chest, I allow."

"We must carry the ship home,"
I cried, beside myself with excitement.

"What's in that there case?"
called Watson, pointing to a large
square box that lay in a corner of
the chest, the little barrels running
stowed to the side of it.

I found the lid free and lifted it,
and discovered a quantity of lumps
of gold and rudely manufactured
rings of the same metal, ornaments,
as I afterwards learned, which had
been worn by African kings and their
wives, and which had been washed down
in the sand

of the rivers from the golden mountains.

Well, even supposing there was not another ha'porth of property aboard this *Mary Carver*, yet there was treasure enough in the great chest at which we stood staring to set up the three of us as gentlemen ashore for the rest of our lives, though our days should prove as long as a parrot's. I burst out singing in my joy, and grasped my companions by the hand.

"Mates, you took your fortunes along with me and risked your lives, and that chest, let alone what may be below, answers the question I have again and again

been putting—How is this adventure to end? Thanks be to heaven, it will end in a fortune! But we must carry it home, boys. If ever we turned to as sailors we must now."

I locked the chest and went out with the men. One pressing, immediate business was to get rid of the dead bodies and sweeten the ship as best we could, since she was to be our home for we knew not how long, seeing that she had only one mast that was of any use, and that we made but three of a crew. Dixon laid hold of the poor dog and tumbled it over the rail. Ceremony was impossible with the dead. The condition of all of

them, saving the remains in the cabin, would not suffer us to think of a patient and a solemn burial. We took a watch, a pocket-book, and a few pounds in American money from the pockets of the captain, as I believed the body to be, and then, attaching a length of chain which had formed a portion of the running-gear to his legs to serve as a sinker, we dropped him over the side. I asked God to have mercy upon the poor sailor's soul as his body struck the clear, blue surface and vanished, and this was the prayer I uttered over the others of them, though the sight of two of them made the words hard to pronounce, so hor-

rible was the disfigurement of putrefaction, and so unbearable the atmosphere till they were gone.

It was blowing a light air from the westward, the sky was a deep hollow of blue, pale with the raining of the white sunshine: there was not a cloud, and the firm line of the horizon swept the confines of the heavens without the tiniest break of ship. All the bodies that we had discovered being overboard, our next step was to explore the forecastle. I cautiously dropped through the little scuttle, not more afraid of the air that was to be breathed below than of the sights which might be in store for

us. However, though the atmosphere was burning hot, it seemed as pure as one might hope to find it in a little fore-castle. There were no bodies here, and I was heartily thankful that it should be so. The furniture was of the customary rough quality: bunks and straw stitched in coarse canvas for bedding, a few sea-chests, here and there a dangling oil-skin. It was enough for us that the place was sweet, and we crawled out of it and went to work to purify the vessel. This we contrived by burning pitch and boiling tar, kettles and pots of which we found in a bit of a compartment bulk-headed off from the galley. The

galley fire burned well, and while we waited for the pitch to boil we took a survey of the vessel's remaining spars.

Everything stood complete at the fore; she was fully rigged there, as I have said, and her bowsprit and jib-booms, with their gear and sails, were uninjured. But abaft she was naked, withered, and lightning-blackened. I said to the men:

"She'll only do with a fair wind, and that we're not going to reckon upon. We must turn to presently and secure this mainmast. I believe we shall be able to rig up some sort of a trysail upon it, and that must help us whenever the

wind draws ahead. The question is, what place shall we steer for? The Canaries are our nearest land, but I don't like the notion of taking our chance of salvage at the hands of Spanish authorities."

"Nor I, sir," said Dixon; "they'll plunder us to our shirts."

"Why not go straight away for home?" exclaimed Watson.

"It is a long voyage," said I, looking up at the solitary towering fabric of foremast.

"Oh, but it can be done," said the man; "you know the road anyhow, Mr. Derbyshire."

"Yes, I can steer you home," said I, "but I don't know about

sailing you home," I added, sending another look aloft.

"It's to be done, sir," said Dixon, "and it must be done by ourselves. If so be as others jine they'll be making shares, and the more that comes the less we shall have to take up, and since it's all ourn by right of finding it I'm for having every farden's worth of the salvage."

I reflected a little, and then said: "Be it so. We'll make up our minds to steer for home."

The two fellows uttered a cheer. We securely closed the cabin, galley, and forecastle, that the fumes and stench of the tar and pitch within might be confined and

do their work. We tried the wheel and found the rudder and steering-gear sound, but the lightning had affected the binnacle compass—had apparently extinguished its polarity—and it revolved with the ship instead of swinging to the lubber's mark. But this was no great matter, for I had observed a tell-tale compass in the captain's cabin; besides which we had a small compass of our own in the boat. I set Dixon and his mate to work to bring all the contents of the boat out of her, and we then sent her adrift, the *Mary Carver* having two good boats of her own in davits, and a small long-boat or cutter stowed keel up forward.

We then thoroughly examined the foremast, going aloft to make sure that nothing was sprung, and having set the topgallantsail we braced the yards round and got the vessel's head to the north. She felt the impulse of the wind, and floated slowly along, though the light breeze was off the beam. We tried her with the foretopmast-staysail and flying-jib, but her head fell off with this canvas with her helm hard down.

This was a thing to be ren-
died,
and without delay; for should the
wind come strong out of the west-
ward we stood in a very short time
to find ourselves uncomfortably
close in with the African coast.

It was now somewhat past noon, and after making a hearty meal off the provisions we had brought with us in the boat we turned to—taking care to secure the helm—and by five o'clock had not only strengthened the mainmast with preventer stays, but had seized a block to the masthead, by means of which we hoisted and set a big spare jib which we had met with in the sail-room forward. By this hour the wind that still hung in the quarter whence it had been blowing in the morning had breezed up to a degree to enable us to form a good opinion of what this jib-headed sail at the main was going to do for us, and my mind

was instantly eased on ascertaining that it allowed the ship to look well up and to carry her staysail and jibs besides. Under this canvas and a main staysail she answered her helm as satisfactorily as though she had been clothed fore and aft, and on heaving the log my two companions sent up another cheer, in which I heartily joined, when I found that the clipper fabric under us was nimbly sliding over the long, blue, crisped swells of the evening sea at the rate of a little less than six knots in the hour.

We were too exhausted, what with the heat and the labor of the day and the sleeplessness of the

two previous nights, to explore the hold; our first step was to make ourselves comfortable, and this we did by ventilating the cabin, preparing beds on the lockers, and finding out where the cabin provisions were stored. We then arranged to steer and keep a lookout thus—one man at the wheel, a second man on deck; the third man below, to lie handily at the foot of the companion-steps ready to jump to the first shout. In this fashion we got through the first night, and all went well with us. The weather was wonderfully beautiful and gentle, the sky rich with stars and the hovering dust of exploded meteors, with a crystal

scar of moon low down in the west at eight o'clock that night, while we were grouped at the wheel, smoking our pipes and talking of the events of the day, scarcely able to realize the existence of the treasure we had lighted upon below, and watching the pale and dusky mass of canvas forward, stirless as carven marble to the breathing of the night wind, but bravely doing its work, as you would have known by the slopping sounds of water alongside.

At midnight a large full-rigged ship passed us. She floated noiselessly by in a phantom shape, close enough for us to hear the mellow chimes of the bell sounding twelve

o'clock. She made no sign, but it would have been all the same had she hailed us; we were determined not to take any help, our resolution being to navigate the *Mary Carver* to England and then claim the salvage; and my waking dream as I walked the deck during my watch was all about the money I should earn by this adventure, my mother's happiness, how I should invest what came to me, how I was to escape the consequences of my action in running from the *Mohican* and helping to steal her boat.

Early next morning, after sounding the well and finding all right with the little ship, Dixon and I, armed with mallets and chisels for

purposes of exploration, entered the hold, leaving Watson at the helm. We first attacked a number of white cases stowed forward of the main-hatch, and found them filled with articles for trucking: kettles, needles, pieces of cotton cloth, powder-flasks, clocks, boots and shoes, tobacco, and so forth. All this stuff remaining proved that the *Mary Carver* had sailed in a hurry, no doubt in consequence of the sickness which had ended in killing her unhappy crew. It was not to be supposed that she would otherwise have quitted the coast with half the freight she had started with from Salem unbartered for the precious commodities

she had made the voyage for. We also found in this part of the hold a number of barrels and tierces and casks of rum, pork, and beef; all which articles, I afterwards heard, were used in this sort of traffic with the natives.

We then made our way aft, and in a very roomy lazarette found a large quantity of small teeth and large tusks, together with a number of casks of palm-oil. The value of the small teeth I did not know, though we afterwards ascertained that they were worth about four shillings a pound; but during a voyage I had made to the Cape I had been told that the worth of large tusks such as those which we

found in the *Mary Carver* averaged from twenty-five to thirty pounds apiece.

I will not speak of the new delight which this discovery raised in us. It was indeed a stroke of fortune not to be credited as falling to the lot of a plain merchant mate and two seamen. The value of the palm-oil I was ignorant of, nor could I imagine what was the weight of the gold-dust and the lumps and rings of the same precious metal in the great chest; but I very well recollect returning on deck with Dixon, and going aft to Watson and telling him of what we had found, and then sitting down with pencil and paper and making

a rough calculation of the value of our booty, as I may call it, which in my figures worked out at between £20,000 and £30,000, to my own and the joyous astonishment of my two shipmates.

The narrative of our progress home would, I fear, make but very tedious reading. Three days after we had boarded the *Mary Carver* a squall blew the triangular sail away, and we came very near to losing our foretopmast. There then followed a succession of light head winds, which worried us to the heart with the delay they caused. In fact, being one day sickened by the spectacle of *Mary Carver* points off her course, the

yards braced fore and aft, and a little surface of oil-smooth wake streaming off at a sharp angle from her stern-post, I seriously proposed making for Madeira, to the northward of which island we had by this time managed to creep. But my two men said no; better the Canaries than Madeira; for at those islands you had the Spaniards, whereas at Madeira the authorities were Portuguese. "Rogues to a man," said Dixon; "who, when they open the chest and see the gold and then spy the tusks and oil in the lazarette, would vamp up some charge against us and throw us into a stinking, dripping jail, where we might lie

and rot, merely as an excuse to effectually plunder us."

So we continued to thrust on as best we could; but with that one mast and a bit of a triangular sail aft, it was slow and dreary work, and I own that my heart would fail me, and often I would again and again look round the sea for a ship, willing in the moods which at such times possessed me to have hailed the first passing vessel and solicited help.

We met with a number of craft as we struggled northwards, and one or two signalled us, but as we were without flags or code-book we could make nothing of their colors. Once in a dead calm a large

schooner-yacht bound south, that lay mirroring her radiant canvas at the distance of about a league, sent a boat to inquire as to our condition, and if we required help; but we had been making fair progress for some days; there was nothing in this interval of calm to diminish our confidence in our being able to safely navigate the *Mary Carver* to England, and we therefore very thankfully and civilly declined the proffer of help

The boat hung alongside with the yacht's master in her; his curiosity was active, his questions numerous, and I was obliged to spin him the yarn we had concocted, taking care to say nothing about

the gold-dust and the ivory in the vessel. We feigned that our object in navigating the ship was to pick up a trifle of money for the saving of her; and this was perfectly true so far as it went. The captain returned to his yacht, and shortly afterwards the boat came away for us again with a present of cigars and a case of champagne from the owner, who was on board, Lord Edward —.

This yacht was the only vessel we spoke until our arrival in the mouth of the English Channel, exactly two months and ten days from the date of our escape from the *Mohican*. We then fell in with a Deal lugger with four men on

board cruising about in search of a job; they spied our condition, and wanted to board us. I answered that we could manage very well without them.

"No, no," cried they; "you are only three hands, you'll want help." And they made as if to come aboard.

If ever a one of them put his foot over the side he had as much right to a share of the salvage as ourselves, who had had all the perils and labor of the navigation of the *Mary Carver* through many hundred leagues of sea. This was not to be borne. I cried:

"The first of you that shows himself I'll chuck overboard."

They looked at my big figure and the iron belaying-pin I flourished, and seeing the temper and meaning in my face they hung in the wind a bit, then shifted their helm, and went away howling a hundred execrations, and using such language as one must go to Deal, that village of public-houses, to hear the like of.

We had made shift among us before entering the Channel to get the anchor to the cathead, and see all ready for bringing up. The anchor was a small one and there was no lack of purchases and tackle, and with the help of a good fore-castle capstan we managed very well. My intention had been

to make Falmouth harbor, as being the nearest and most convenient spot to let go our anchor in. There was, to be sure, Mount's Bay, but I did not relish the notion of anchoring in that wide space of water, where it might come on to blow before we could get a second anchor ready, or before help could reach us from the shore. And you must know, besides, that in these salvage jobs your prize is not your own until your anchor is down, in a harbor, and the vessel safe.

Had we brought up off Penzance, and bad weather followed, necessitating assistance, the people who helped us would have been in a position to claim salvage equal-

ly with ourselves. Therefore I steered for Falmouth harbor, but the wind headed us, and for three days we were driving about the Channel, until a slant enabled me to stand for Plymouth, past whose fine breakwater we brought up on a Thursday morning, after a passage that had been interminable to my anxiety, though in reality it was a specimen of fairly speedy navigation of which we had certainly no reason to be ashamed.

The story I related was credited; the *Mary Carver* was taken possession of by the Receiver of Wrecks, but it was four months before the award was made by the Court. The value of the cargo was as-

essed at £32,000, of which £7,000 was given to us for salvage—£3,500 to me, and the balance between the two men.

I remained very quiet until the money was paid. My fear was that Captain Scudder might have communicated the intelligence of my escape to a passing ship homeward bound, and that the truth of the story would reach the ears of the owners of the *Mohican*, who for all I could tell might be able to take such steps as would preclude me from participating in the award of the Admiralty Court. The owners knew I was at home, and believed my story; they had congratulated me upon the treasure I

had stumbled upon, and on the merits of my good fortune, perhaps, had even offered me a berth as second mate. This offer I professed myself unable to accept until the decision of the Court, along with the money, had reached me.

I had some thought of quitting the country, and of awaiting in France the news of the arrival of the *Mohican*, and secretly watching from a secure retreat the shaping of events; but I could not have asked my mother to leave her home without explaining my motives, nor indeed could I have withdrawn from England alone without telling her my reasons, and this I had not the heart to do, not only

for fear of grieving her, but because I knew that her high principles and resolved religious character would insist upon my going to the owners of the *Mohican* and confessing myself; and this assuredly I was in no temper to do either, remembering how greatly I had suffered, how insupportable had been the provocation, and how, also, I might count with certainty upon the owners taking the side of Captain Scudder, influenced not a little also by thoughts of their lost boat.

It was not until the arrival of the *Mohican* in the River Thames that my mind was eased. Mr. Hollins, the chief mate, had

brought the ship home in the room of Captain Scudder, who had died of a blow he had received from the carpenter, whom he had barbarously attacked on hearing that I had escaped, and who, in striking out for his own defence, had dealt the rascal a very much heavier blow than I had delivered. The carpenter had been charged with manslaughter at Adelaide, but acquitted, so overwhelming was the testimony in his favor by all the hands, including the passengers.

When this news reached me I wrote to Hollins and Paterson, and we went together to the offices of the owners, to whom I communicated the full particulars of the

captain's brutal behavior to me, my imprisonment, his barbarous threat of the forepeak, and my subsequent escape in the boat. The two mates were at hand to confirm every word I said. I offered to pay for the boat, but the partners, much to my surprise, very generously declined to allow me to do so. They said that they had for some time doubted Captain Scudder's fitness for the responsible berth he filled, and had resolved that this should be the last voyage he should make in their employ. They were satisfied that I had been wantonly outraged, and by way of making amends for the indignity and suffering which had

been caused me by the shipmaster in their service, they repeated their offer of a post as second mate on board the *Mohican*, that would next voyage be sailing under the command of Captain Hollins, with Paterson as her chief officer.

Thus terminated this strange passage of my seafaring career, which is now made public for the first time.

THE END.

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